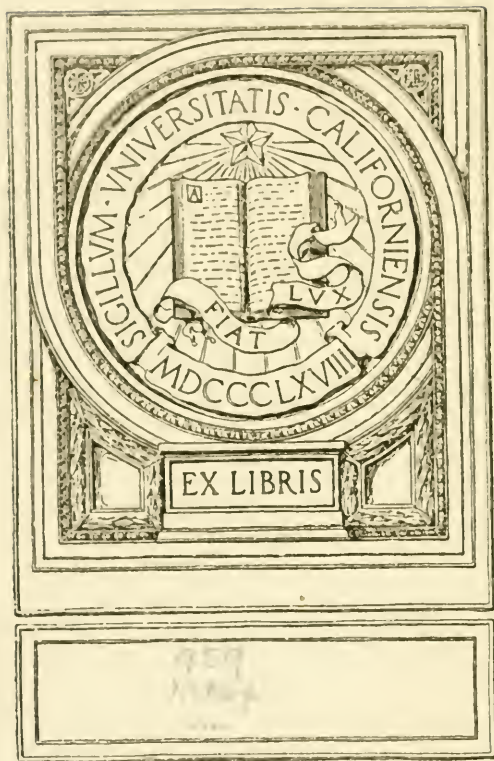


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MARIAMNE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

POETRY

The Vinedresser and other Poems, 1899

Aphrodite against Artemis, 1901

Absalom, 1903

Danaë, 1903

The Little School, 1905

Poems, 1906

PROSE

The Centaur and Bacchant, from the French by
Maurice de Guérin, 1899

Altdorfer, 1900

Dürer, 1904

Correggio, 1906

Art and Life, 1910

MARIAMNE

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MARIAMNE

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THE CHARACTERS

HEROD THE GREAT, King of Judea.

ANANEL, High Priest.

CASTOBAR, Captain of the Guard, brother-in-law to Herod.

SOHEMUS OF ITUREA, Treasurer and, during the King's absence, Governor of the Alexandrium; like his master he has become a Jew for political reasons.

SAMEAS (or SHEMAIAH), Chief Rabbi in the Sanhedrin.

HEROD'S CUPBEARER.

A STUDENT.

COURTIERS, GUARDS, EUNUCHS, OFFICERS, etc.

MARIAMNE, Queen of Judea.

ALEXANDRA, her mother.

CYPROS, Mother of Herod.

SALOME, Herod's sister, Castobar's wife.

MIRIAM, MARAH, REBECCA, HEPSIBAH, NAOMI, and other women attendants on the Queen.

AN ARAB GIRL, and other attendants on the royal widows and princess.

ACT I

[The courtyard of the Alexandrium, surrounded by fortifications in many parts only temporarily restored since their demolition by Gabinius. Right, the outer gate. Left, steps lead up into the castle; from within SOHEMUS is heard in earnest conversation with ALEXANDRA. They issue at the top of the steps and his words become audible]

He has been near his death a thousand times,
And is so rash, he must be caught at last;
The Jews who love thy daughter, hate him; wait.

ALEXANDRA

Wait while she ruins all? She will not come
To give him welcome.

SOHEMUS

Will not come?

ALEXANDRA

Not she:

Obsessed by knowing he would have her slain
If he himself died, she must flaunt her hate
Full in his face.

SOHEMUS [musing]

That is not wise.

ALEXANDRA

She has no policy more than a child.

[CASTOBAR enters through the gate. His commands to the soldiers whom he has been drilling have echoed occasionally across the scene]

SOHEMUS [indicating the newcomer's bearing]
This Idumean Castobar swims in the news.

[ALEXANDRA shrugs her shoulders, then, turning, directs her women, who have joined her, to spread her carpet at the top of the steps, in the centre, and to keep a long-handled parasol over her as the sun is hot. SOHEMUS descends and meets CASTOBAR.]

CASTOBAR [waggishly]

Good Sohemus, I thought the King was dead?

SOHEMUS [gravely]

So many thought, but God in heaven be praised. . . .

CASTOBAR

Ay, God in heaven and . . .? valour on the earth!

SOHEMUS

'Tis Idumean, Sir, to halve God's praise.

CASTOBAR

Right! it is so; our Herod's Idumean,
And halves it, *Jew*.

SOHEMUS

With us 'tis blasphemy.

CASTOBAR

Ungenerous Jew, not backward wouldst thou be
In David's praise; why not in Herod's then?

SOHEMUS [taking him by the arm and walking with him]

You think, because the Roman is our friend,

The fanatics will moderate their rage.

I was not born a Jew, no more than Herod,

No, nor thyself; but I, to serve my King,

Seem what I seem; and wouldst thou serve him, speak

As though Shemaiah had thy note of hand,

Was at thine elbow, must be pacified.

[He gives him a gentle push toward the gate whither he has led him.]

CASTOBAR [going out]

Damn Jews,

And, saving soldiers, damn all kinds of men !

[SOHEMUS rejoins the QUEEN.]

ALEXANDRA

Now counsel me on present means and ends :

Should we not strive to please him all we can ?

Give him such welcome as shall blind his eyes ?

Salome and proud Cypros will be here,

Their litters have been watched along the road ;

And, had I not secured the vantage ground,

They would seem first to welcome Herod home :—

Which must not be and shall not.

SOHEMUS

Herod will look for welcome—will be pleased

To meet it . . . If thy daughter grant hers not . . .

ALEXANDRA

Childish fool !

SOHEMUS

Yet, if she will not come, it may be best

His sister and his mother, here alone,

Salute his advent.

ALEXANDRA

Sohemus, how so ?

SOHEMUS

Queen,

His love will leave them slighted on these steps ;

Till she is in his arms he will not pause ;

Fully two years it is since they have met ;

His gifts sent on prove his impatience hot ;

Shouldst thou be with them and scarce heeded too,
The aspersion thou wouldst share.

ALEXANDRA

Be the whole theirs! . . .

SOHEMUS

Yet quit thou not the steps before they come.

ALEXANDRA

How! must I serve for target to their gibes?

SOHEMUS

But should they crowd thee from thy station, Queen,
(Which in thy daughter's absence well may be),
'Twould both excuse thee and discomfit them
Reported, later on, to Herod's ear.

ALEXANDRA

Right, right!

It shall so, if I own a woman's tongue!

Behold, they come. Thou, Sohemus, go forth—
Meet him upon the road—prepare his mind
For Mariamne's sullen-browed caprice.

[SOHEMUS descends the steps, passes the Princesses with gestures of profound salutation, and goes out through the gate. The grooms take the mules and litters round behind the castle; while CYPROS and SALOME mount slowly with their parasols, eunuchs and women. When they arrive where ALEXANDRA stands in front of her women, she turns]

Now, girls, be not so simple as to budge;
These Queens have not so good a right as we.

[To the PRINCESSES]

Nay, haughty Cypros, come control thy knave;
He elbows this young girl. Rough wretch, stand back!
[She strikes the eunuch, who gives way.]

CYPROS

Nay, Alexandra, thou shalt give us place.

ALEXANDRA

I will not, Cypros ; we are of the house,
And room there is on either hand of us.

CYPROS

We are more numerous ; thou hast no men.

But we have brought sufficient.

[To her EUNUCHS, indicating ALEXANDRA'S women]

Carry them to one side.

SALOME

Ha, Alexandra, thou art left alone !

Call forth thy daughter's eunuchs ! Where is she ?

CYPROS

Knows she her mother doth sustain affront ?

SALOME [advancing right on to ALEXANDRA]

Madam, thou surely wilt not here persist

Dissevered from thy train ?

I thank thee for thy place.

ALEXANDRA [retreating]

Cypros,

My daughter loves me more than's in thy race

To yield affection parent, child, or wife.

CYPROS

My son's blood is too cool ? 'Tis scandal only

Found his uxorious fame ! He hath a mistress ;

Men never are so fond in wedlock. Sooth,

I will be angry at the next reproach

Directed 'gainst his wife-spoiling. No, no,

He's more the man than to be satisfied

With one proud yellow Jewess.

ALEXANDRA

[While a girl slips round the castle, and joins CYPROS' train]

Cypros, rail !

I leave thee in possession of the steps.

Herod will wait upon me where thy slaves

Shall not find entrance.

CYPROS [turning to her train, as ALEXANDRA enters the castle]

How is it Mariamne comes not forth ?

[ONE OF THOSE who have received the girl and helped to disguise her with shawls]

Madam, here is the Arab girl, whom thou

Contrivedst to get placed i' th' kitchen suite.

[They push the girl forward.]

CYPROS

Why comes the Queen not forth ?

ARAB GIRL [speaking glibly]

Most noble lady,

Nothing touched her ; all has been sent in vain :

Most wonderful apparel bought in Rhodes !

One fall was of a tissue light as air !

And there were pattens mother-of-pearl inlaid !

And, priceless, wholly made of fine white wool,

So soft it seemed to flow like cream, not fold,

A chlamys fashioned to Athenian taste !

The Roman purple, so her women said,

Becomes her swarthy caste of countenance

To such perfection, that it makes them sigh

To think that she refused to put it on.

Nor would she scarcely glance at graven stones,—

Which are a scandal to these Jewish girls,
Because of naked idols on them wrought
Which do deceive the eye, they seem so human,
So fit for life, and formed to satisfy,
Though tiny ! tiny !

CYPROS

Peace !—But Mariamne ?

ARAB GIRL

O madam, Mariamne wears to-day
What every day she wears, and that not queenly !
She hath grown so neglectful of herself
Since first she heard that Herod lived, though false
Report had noised his death. She loves him not :—
Nor hath she really, so her women hold,
Since first she learnt from Joseph, four years back,
How Herod had provided, should he die,
That she must thereupon be put to death ;—
Although this Joseph was a councillor,
And did protest that Herod's very love
Was the true cause of that ferocious purpose
Her wrath is trebled now ; for Sohemus
Received the same command as Joseph had.
'Tis thought she will estrange him utterly,—
Since she hath never practised to conceal
Her every humour, cross him how they might !
But, madam, still, they say such gifts do prove
That love has grown with absence on his side ;
And yet they tremble for the Queen, whom all
Love dearly ; for her goodness is to them
As marked as is her humour toward her Lord.
SALOME [signing to the girl to fall back]
Her pride surpasseth Jezebel's : but hark !

The trumpets which announce my brother near !
He will expect to find his wife here stationed,
Which disappointment should enhance our kindness.

[HEROD, attired in purple, enters through the gate,
followed by SOHEMUS, CASTOBAR, COURTIERS,
GREEKS, and GUARDS who gradually fill the yard.]

CYPROS

Herod, thy mother bids thee welcome.

SALOME

Thy sister

Welcomes her brother, Herod.

CYPROS

We rejoiced

To hear of all thy Roman honours, son.

HEROD

Health to thee, mother—but I seek my Queen !
Salome, is not Mariamne here ?

SALOME

O Herod, fortunate in every sort !
Most fortunate that of his wife men say—
Even the gloomy Pharisees have said—
She is the Rose of Sharon ! They say well ;
Most favoured art thou, that it should be so :
Yet only in his wife can it be said
Of Herod, that he much deserveth pity.

CYPROS

My son, thy former Doris had been here.
She was as we are, Idumean born,
And not a stiff-necked Jewess.

HEROD

What is this ?

Let me pass on !

SALOME [getting in front of him with a scornful mimicry of the Queen]

Thus she received thy gifts :—

“ I have too many robes and could be pleased
With just a queen’s attire. The concubine
Needs quilted jackets—must be hitched aloft
On ebony clogs inlaid with mother-of-pearl :
The veil, that floats five minutes in the air
Before it reach the ground, is not too light
For one who, like a feather, by caprice
Is puffed above a monarch’s head ; there floats ;
There trembles, smiled on, talked to ; afterwards
Is swept up with the dust—as Doris was.
Doris lives somewhere in the rubbish still,
Take her these things ! ”

CYPROS

Discarding even the gossamer tissue thus !

HEROD

O mother, that thou hat’st my wife, I know :—
And sister, thou hadst got a ready tongue
Upon this theme, before I went from hence.—
Ye do impede me ; pray remove your arms ;
I am in haste, and fear I owe to you
This cold reception ; for ye cross the Queen
Whose inborn humour brooks with little enough,—
[Reaching the top of the steps and looking down on
them, he stamps.]

But, were she patient as these pavement stones,
I know ye would not relish rest before
The limit of that sufferance were passed.
I pray ye to give welcome to my friends ;

Since I must labour to undo what ye
Have wrought so kindly in my household here.
[He goes in alone.]

CYPROS [turning to the crowd]

This must a mother bear that hath conceived
A King, by native gift, raised to the clouds.

[Before she mounts the last few steps to go in]

Good friends, I pray you, follow to the hall.

[When the steps are wholly covered by the backs of
the crowd swarming up, the curtain comes rapidly
down.]

ACT II

[MARIAMNE'S apartment in the Alexandrium. It opens to the south towards Jerusalem, between carved columns of alumin wood, upon a gallery over which an awning of violet cloth slopes out like eaves, and is supported by two slanting poles. These rest on the gallery rail and are corded to the feet of columns; from the centre towards the left a flight of stairs, in which the gallery terminates, descends to the gardens, while luxuriant tree tops are visible over this and beneath the awning fringe. The bed, which is slung in a frame carved and painted after the Egyptian manner, is enclosed by curtains of lawn; it stands on the right, leaving a narrow passage between its head and the wall of the apartment. In front on the same side is a doorway closed by a curtain. On the left, half-way between the pillars and the front, is a second door with folding leaves of cedar wood. Beside this stand two large vases of water with basins to dip, and a great variety of slippers, pattens, sandals, etc. In the centre at the foot of the bed is a carpet on which are two ebony stools. The bed-curtains part near the head, and two crowns are visible upon the pillows. When the curtain rises the scene is empty. HEROD enters through the folding doors; he looks round, claps his hands.]

AN EUNUCH [entering behind him]

Hail to my lord the King!

HEROD [turning]

Where is the Queen?

EUNUCH

My lord, she hath descended to the bath.

[HEROD strides out through the curtained doorway on the left, and the EUNUCH returns through the folding doors after a minute or two.]

[MARIAMNE and MIRIAM come up the stairs from the garden ; they are out of breath and have been running. MARIAMNE is dressed in a long white simar ; her hair is down and still wet.]

MIRIAM [who is similarly dressed, carries towels, and speaks with assumed cheerfulness]

He did not see us turn along the wall,
Therefore will search the gardens, and the more
That thou dost ever haunt them : this he knows ;
For he knows all thy ways. We shall have time
For such a toilette as becomes a Queen.

MARIAMNE [placing a fuchsia spray she has brought in from the gardens between her lips, claps her hands impatiently : then as the Eunuch enters, says, pointing with the spray]

Hasten my girls : they loiter at the bath.

[EUNUCH crosses the stage and passes the curtain. The QUEEN sits down.]

MIRIAM [drying Mariamne's hair]

They will be here anon : I bade them hold
The King in parley at the inner door.

MARIAMNE

He hunts me, hunts me ; violent doth stretch across
His but-imagined grave, to slay me there,
The widowed mother of his little ones ;—
In case death seize him, this is his command,
My life—his children's mother's life!—be taken ;—
With policy ! cold forethought ! thus he thwarts

The monster, that his jealous dreams paint large,
My second husband!—which should I forget,
I must demean me like a serving maid,
Thy fellow, not thy mistress.
[The women enter : they are dressed in white simars and
carry huge baskets piled with clothes or towels.]

MARIAMNE

Quick, girls, my mourning robes ! and find me those
I for my brother wore !
[Shutting her eyes and pressing the leaves of the fuchsia
against them]

Aristobulus,

Brother, O let thy beauty flood my sight ;
Thy death he compassed and not planned alone !
[Looking up]
Thy murderer comes !
[Turning to the women, who with the help of several
Eunuchs have brought out five or six chests in which
they are rummaging]

How now ! So many chests ?

MIRIAM

I cannot call to mind in which they are.

MARIAMNE

Make haste, make haste !

MIRIAM

This key must have got bent.

HEPSIBAH

Perchance it fits this.

MARIAMNE

Come, how slow ye are !

[Plaiting the fuchsia into her hair]

Oh, to begin again!

[Taking up a mirror]

I thought he had been dead.

The rumours made it probable,—but lo!

I still am Herod's wife.—Poor wretched fool,

Thy beauty saves the shame of many a smile

Which else 'twould be thy lot to simulate.

Thy brother's murderer's wife!

[Tosses the mirror aside.]

To think that as my husband is he king

Though none by birth! Yes, crowned,—and by my hand,

Armed,—and with power I lend. One who has slain

My brother and grandfather, he commands

This bed and my fidelity.

[Crunching up the spray]

O God,

And canst thou see, and not be moved to wrath?

MIRIAM

Behold the very robe, lustreless black.

HEPSIBAH [coming forward from the gallery, while the Queen hurriedly drapes herself]

The King doth mount the stairs.

MARIAMNE

Leave us alone, but be within our call.

[They go out on the left.]

HEROD [entering from the gallery]

Why, Mariamne, here's a wild-wood craze?

Wilt thou be hunted like the shy gazelle?

But what! what mean these doleful draperies!

This stiff averted bearing?

[He stops and muses a moment : then in a changed voice]

Queen of Judea,
Great princess of the house of Maccabees,
Right royal spouse, from Rhodes am I returned,
The friend of Cæsar, honoured by his hand
In cordial warmth as to an equal given :
And, since I have escorted him to Egypt
Providing water through the waste Peræa,
Commended by his lips with estimation
As much beyond my hopes as my desert.
And from Augustus to my Queen I bear
Gifts and exceeding honour—Straton's Tower,
The site we coveted to build a city ;
And Jericho with all her glorious palms,
Her shrubs that yield the balsam, and those pools
Called " Diamonds of the Desert " ; add to this
Samaria, Gadara, Anthedon, Hippos !
Thou crown of all the Asmonean line,
Thy borders are restored—restored ? extended !—
Gaza and Joppa, all the littoral,
Cities renowned and thriving marts and ports
Wherein the west doth traffic with the east,
Accessions most momentous to thy realm.
And I, that am the steward of thy wealth—
The husband of thine honour,—here present
True tables of the increase come to hand.

[Holding out his tablets]

Thy wealth, see, trebled ; while thine honour stands
Higher than ever erst : but clearer yet
On tables of my heart I bear inscribed
The profit of swift thoughts that passed like ships
Athwart the flood to thee, and made return

Laden with wondrous gains,—and now I kneel
With all a proffered tribute to thy joy.

[A pause, then rising and changing his tone]

Thou thinkst to show thy power over me,
Treating me thus! These mourning robes attest
More lightness in thy mind, than my forbearance
Can speak that love of thee which holds my chafe . . .
Why, every father yields as good a proof
To his child's pettish humour every year,
As this thou dost exact with pains so great.

[A silence, then in softer tones once more, and stooping
to lift the spray of fuchsia]

See, thus must flowers suffer from a storm .
The bloom of life from anger suffers thus :
Something is lost! Or may this thought be truer?—
That as the balsam will alone yield gum
To violence, when the sharp jagged flints are struck
Deep through the bark, and golden drops collect ;—
Harsh is the treatment needful ere true hearts
Shall yield their balm, more costly than the best
That trickles priceless from so rare a shrub.

[Kissing the hem of her robe he pauses ; then starting
up and back, paces the room, dragging the scattered
robes with his feet and spurning them]

These robes, that here lie scattered, these are not
The robes I sent thee! Where are those I sent?
It had not been so virtuous thus arrayed
(Though more to please thy husband than thyself),
To welcome me!

[He stands still trying to control himself]

Thou wilt not speak ; how can I learn the fault,
Which in this entertainment meets award—

Just, it may be ?

Canst thou appoint some third
Who may expound our quarrel ?

Mariamne,
Has there some lying scandal altered thee ?
Have I been wronged ? O speak ! Hast thou been
wronged ?

Thou art but young : I will not blame thee, speak !
Come, come, I must insist : when thou dost feel
These loving, strong and comfortable arms
Protect thee, thou wilt yield thy secret up.

I do remember how I found thine eyes
Behind this veil, more lovely after tears !

[Having put his arms round her, he draws the veil from
off her face : she averts her eyes and groans. He breaks
from her and rushes out by the staircase.]

MARIAMNE [left alone, sinking back on one of the
stools, sighs]

Little enough, little enough, I then
Thought that to die in happiness was bliss !
Oh that they had but made us prisoners
When, from Antigonus and the Parthians, we
Toiled through the desolate land in waggons jerked !
Better it must have been had he then died,
And we, the prey of heathen archers, fallen
Deep in dishonourable servitude,
Rather than lived, him whom we loved to know
More savage, more defiling than such foes !
[She bows down her head and is silent.]

ALEXANDRA [entering through the curtain]
Ha ! truly, Mariamne, thou art mad !

Dost want to see thy mother's severed head
Roll on the courtyard stones? or dost thou choose
Instant decapitation now to end
Thy troubles, patience judged as not worth while?
I met thy tyrant; murder on his face
Was stamped, as on a warrant his great seal
In red and seething wax, and am informed
Of how thou hast received him, childish fool!

MARIAMNE

Mother, what mean these words? since thou thyself
Didst prove me, it was clean impossible
To hold my husband guiltless or to yield him,
As I had done, the utmost benefit
Of what doubt still remained? Thou didst upbraid
Smile, kiss or anxious thought—all signs of love,
Whatever I received or have returned,
Becoming to our married state,—as nought
But base impiety towards my brother:
And this not once, but every day!

ALEXANDRA

Alas!

In what have I deserved so blind a child,
So little capable to understand?
The women of our house have been, till now,
Commended for rare politic insight:
Dost thou not know our lives are in his hand?
A word can end us, child!

MARIAMNE

Alas, I know.

ALEXANDRA

O thou dost know! It is the grace of God
If thou dost know.

MARIAMNE

What can I do ?

ALEXANDRA

What canst thou do ? Why, thou canst save my life !
A smile or two : even to add a kiss,
Where thou hast squandered thousands, were but little
To save thy mother !

MARIAMNE

Little ?

His murderer ?

ALEXANDRA

 This would show well enough,
Had he been by Augustus taken off,
Or with his credit shattered had returned,
(Which things were lively hoped) : if then thou hadst
Repudiated Herod and his deeds,
No fault could have been found ; but now, since all
Strengthens his hold upon our hapless land,—
Since that his crown is set more firmly on
Than ere before—since with him now he brings
Roman decrees endorsed by Roman legions,—
Since thou and I may certainly expect
To see all friends, who promised us their aid,
Lie quiet and seem unconcerned in aught
That doth affect us,—we must, knowing this,
Be all the help unto ourselves we can.
His passion for thee is our only shield,
And this wouldst thou destroy ! Come, come, more
sense !
At thy best speed send humbly for the King
And win him with thy cunningest address ;

Think, certainly, Salome is at work !
Good Sohemus now stands where Joseph stood ;
For his sake be thou speedy ! Cypros, too,
She will be fanning her dear son's hot mind
With all the wind her arrogance conceives !

MARIAMNE

Mother ! thou art persuading me almost
That thou didst never credit his contriving
Aristobulus' death, and that thou hast
By nothing else been moved but mere ambition.

ALEXANDRA

I been by nothing moved ! my son cut off :—
My crown upon my daughter's head disgraced !—

MARIAMNE

How couldst thou entertain so vile a thought,
That I should prostitute or lip or body
Unto my brother's murderer again ?

ALEXANDRA

This is no season for a show of virtue !
Believe, if it consoles thee thus to do,
Him blameless quite, whilst thou art in his power.
But think at once of friends who risk their lives
Upon the tiptoe grandeur of thy pride—
On the imperious crossing of those brows
And the pinched wilful silence of ripe lips ;
For time to play this pretty masquerade,
My life, and that of Sohemus, is pledged !
Think, mistress, of these plain impressive facts !
I ne'er had dreamed, imagination-struck,
Thou couldst have gone such lengths in their despite,
Lost in this grand performance of thy pride !

MARIAMNE

Alas, alas, have I no friends at all ?

ALEXANDRA

It likes thee little to regard them such.

MARIAMNE

But did he plan Aristobulus' death ?

ALEXANDRA

Come, ask him and believe him ; for my credit,
I fear, is fallen in my daughter's eyes !

MARIAMNE

O mother, tell me, what dost thou believe ?

ALEXANDRA

Convinced I am, thou hast dire need to love him,
And best be speedy with some proof thou dost,
If Sohemus thou prizest or thy mother.
There is no time to lose ! Bah ! take this style,
Here are thy tablets—write.

[She claps her hands and an eunuch enters.]

[MARIAMNE writes and then bows her face into her hands.]

ALEXANDRA

Here, slave, take these at once unto the King,
And yield them, mind you, to no hand but his !

[Exit EUNUCH followed by ALEXANDRA.]

MARIAMNE [left alone]

O Lord, give light unto my groping eyes !
Herod was noble, and I loved him well ;
Didst thou not make him beautiful and strong,
Drape him with majesty and give that air
The lion hath, anointing him with might ?

And in his oft-tried heart didst thou not place
The fervency of long-enduring love,
Tuning his lips like magic to my soul,
Entrancing all my softness in a spell?—
But how can I believe that what was, is?

[Rising]

At least, while doubt may still be entertained,
Let me not be unjust. Though all were proved,
The worst, has there not been excuse for that?
Has my contentious mother ever failed
To yield him exculpation full as far
As forceful circumstance can exculpate?
Aristobulus was to her intents
No better than a drawn and brilliant sword,
Wherewith she threatened Herod every month :
Could he unbroken wrest it from her hand?
His crime is then excused as self-defence.
Has she not used e'en me to mar his peace?

[With gathering animation]

Her grandam, as she never can forget,
An Alexandra, ruled for full nine years,—
This constitutes her right to Herod's crown!
Because my father was the King—because
Herod, than whom no man more born to rule,
As she admits, has praised her subtle mind—
Because hers is the Asmonean blood,—
Why, she has been seditious, steeped in plots!
Yet Herod has entreated me ignobly
By this command that I should straight be slain
If from Augustus he should fail of grace ;
This man, that after Joseph's death, did swear,
Drenching my hands in tears, with broken accents,

Never to give again such vile commands—
Or me again accuse
As he had dared accuse. . . .

[HEROD enters and she turns to face him]

Now, I will speak.

I am the Queen of Israel by birth,
In line direct from Simon Maccabæus,
Fifth regent of the Asmonean house ;
And thou from me derivest thy best claim.

Thou hast no trust, because thou hast no honour !
Thine actions still confirm my mother's cries ;
Aristobulus may right well have perished
By order of a man that pays for spies
To overreach his wife.

I can speak aptly ; thou art proud of me !
Wit, wit ! why, Cleopatra had as much,
Which Antony did love belike as well !
—A brace of names that are a byword now.
Is wit and beauty, beauty, wit and crown,
My sum and total told ? Beauty I have,
But, noble that I am, I do not boast ;
My thought was beautiful before my speech ;
My heart was overflowing ere my lips.
“ Man, like a man, still thinks to promise easy ;—”
Which dictum, trust me, widely though it hold,
Holds not for those who, ere they utter vow,
Have curbed their whole souls to one great desire—
Even to serve for their love's sake a man
Less noble as to blood, pure as to birth
Than were themselves or were their ancestors.

But 'tis no service, slavery it is
That will content thee ! Think of Love :
To be beforehand with most awful time
Love binds a wet cloth round her aching brow,—
As I have bound, to wait thy messengers
Sent from the wars, and watched the whole night long ;—
Love, calm in spite of danger, answers need
Prepared and helpful.

But there ! I speak to Herod, whose ear sings
With cries of poison, lust and perjury,
All which foul crimes inhabit one whom he
Pretends to love despite them all. Strange Love !
A king, thou art not ill : an actor, Sir,
So sorry, Wonder weeps to watch thee fail.
Thou dost not love me ; own that and be cured ;
Thou lov'st to dream thyself madly in love,
But dost impose on none except thyself.

HEROD

I swear I love thee, and not least when thus
Thy blood doth seethe, for thou art voluble
As at no other time ;
Thine eloquence expands ;
Thy beauty lightens, while thy voice discovers
Not my faults only, but its own rich range.
Yet jealousy !—hast thought upon its cause ?
Of what 'tis token ? and from whence it springs ?

MARIAMNE

Too much, too much. But thou hast told me tales
Of cunning Greeks, who have writ manners so,
That common men now step into the garb
Of kings and queens passed nobly long ago,

Mistakingly beheld, applauded even
For deeds, which once required costlier blood
Through lavish wounds poured out. This, with some
paint

And heightened socks, the scum of Greece effects.

I marvel not ; yet think my royal eyes

Had scarcely been content, nor my hands warmed

With genial claps of praise, since thou thyself,

Augustus' friend, canst not hit off the king,

As nature prompts me ask to have it done.

HEROD

Thy scorn's not just, indignant beauteous Queen.

MARIAMNE

Thy common jealousy degrades thy crown.

HEROD

My jealousy has passed away, years since.

MARIAMNE

Beheading one old man made thee secure ?

HEROD

Of whom have I been jealous since that date ?

MARIAMNE

Methinks I still am kept like miser's gold.

HEROD

To whom have I denied access to thee ?

MARIAMNE

Remember Joseph's death ; thou art returned,

Thy native gifts may make thee royal thus

A second time.

I tremble, Sir, for grey-haired Sohemus.

HEROD

My hands were bound ; the posture of affairs

Precluded much that willingly I would
For thee have done. The Alexandrium
I do admit a prison, yet secure ;
Thou and thy mother have lived safely here.
My life and my authority so poised
Upon the point of hazard as they were,
How could I trust thy mother more at large,
Or thee, my bride, within Salome's reach ?
Be gentle, for thy steward did his best.

MARIAMNE

Herod, might but my heart feel sure of that !
Yet of one thing take note : my mother, Sir,
Shall ne'er again be privy to my mind.
It is the doubt I can but entertain,—
The fatal influence of her restless schemes
May have been more in our calamities
Than thine ambition or unscrupulous acts—
That makes me seek this interview with thee,
Howe'er the colour of thine actions lower.

HEROD

My Mariamne, what great joy is this !

MARIAMNE

My lord, a little wait : an hour since
I hated thee, with all my heart I did.
It may be well to prelude yet our peace.
[She claps her hands, then to MIRIAM who enters]
Fetch me those robes my lord hath latest sent
And bid my tirewomen wait at once ;
And pack these chests and see them put away.
[She throws off the mourning robe and veil.]

HEROD

This is my Queen !

[He turns and kicks the robes together towards the chests, which the women and eunuchs commence packing while the Queen is being arrayed by her maidens. Then with rhetorical parade]

Gowns, gowns, their service done,
The habits of past time ; black mourning robes,
White festal raiment, radiant, striped with gold ;
Pelusian linen—filled with beauty once
And now, like vacant dwellings, caving inwards :—
Your folds are speechless ; front me ye cannot,
Though once informed with pride, though flaunting once
An accidental bravery. Fleered at prayers,
Did ye? Limp sleeves whisked ye away from touches
That plead? So go those moods ye served.—My Queen,
Disdain and pride are rent and cast aside ;
Aloofness falls ; discarded must spite be,
For love upholds the vital part of life
That walks into the future, and love's wardrobe
Is courtesy, staid gentleness and hope
That smiles and helps, and happy confidence,
Glowing contentment, rainbow-hued resolves—
High Virtue's vesture.
These, that outlast change,
Life must return to,—
Perennial fashions they !

MARIAMNE

Herod, believe thy words !
And I will trust them.

HEROD

Doubt'st thou their bravery ?

Frank colours are of truth.

MARIAMNE

Enough, enough,

Wit's but half wise.

HEROD

I have engaged some Greeks,
Philosophers approved and rhetoricians,
Who can discourse divinely and debate ;
They will afford thee frequent entertainment
Recounting famous deeds betid of yore
In Greece and Rome. I mean them to instruct
In all august accomplishments our sons.

MARIAMNE

My lord, a learned Alexandrian Jew
Has oft beguiled my leisure this past winter,
And showed me how the Grecian wisdom springs
From Moses or Melchizedek, perchance,
And is a sister branch unto our own,
Deserving all esteem and recognition.
But while I think of it, good Sohemus
Has, in solicitude for our best welfare,
Fast bound our gratitude ; may I request,
That he obtain some fitting recompense ?

HEROD

Thy will shall be my pleasure.

MARIAMNE

How is this ?

HEROD

Entrancing ! Cleopatra is surpassed.

MARIAMNE

This addereth is a well-worked pelisse.

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HEROD

'Tis from Damascus, and, I deem, unique.
They tell me that bright seed used in the fringe
Comes from the land of Chittim, and the veil
That like a dew envelops thee in sheen
Is from Taprobana : it hallows thee !

MARIAMNE

Shall we walk forth, where the cool trees invite ?

HEROD

By all means ; noon grows heavy. Hark ! an air
Freshens the alleys rustling.
[To an Eunuch]

Bid them pitch

My saffron tabernacle on the lawn
Beside the basin of the golden carp.

[EUNUCH salaams and goes out.]

HEROD [standing outside]

Jerusalem lies just beyond that ridge :

At last, Fortune and Peace permitting, I

Hope to rebuild her temple on a scale

More fit to crown the city of God's choice.

[As he and MARIAMNE descend a parasol is raised
over them, and all the women and eunuchs flock down
in their wake. When the scene is empty the curtain
descends.]

ACT III

[MARIAMNE'S apartment, the same as in the last. A few clothes are still littered round the open chests. Outside, the tree tops are bathed in the noon blaze. When the curtain rises the scene is empty. But soon MARAH returns furtively up the stair; first glances back toward the gardens to make sure she has been unobserved, then, surveying the room, proceeds on tip-toe to the front and holds the curtain out from the doorway on the left; then begins to sing a simple air.]

Powder thy hair with dust as blue
As is the sky!
Tint thou thy nails with henna red
As heart's blood shed!
Streak in thy scanty eyebrows, do,
Legs of a fly!
Improve thy cheeks with painted guile,
And smile—O smile!
Thou never wilt appear so sweet as I,
Nor win my love from me.
Beneath thy casement he will never sigh,
Nor, called, climb up to thee.

[HEROD'S cupbearer appears through the curtain, and, still holding it, she addresses him; while slowly SALOME mounts the staircase and, entering the room, draws near to them, keeping behind the bed.]

O Phanuel, what says my warlike Haman?
—Thy Hepsibah can think of nought but thee!
Has Haman sent no present to his love?
—For speech with thee poor Hepsibah doth thirst!

Did he not fill thy mouth with soothing words,
My tall Samaritan warrior,—did he not?
—She oft had noted thee and, in her sleep,
Seen thee thereafter.—Speak of Haman first,
Then will I pay thine ears with Hepsibah.
Had he but entrance to the house himself
I'd sing him up the stairs and not need thee.

CUPBEARER

Hist, and take breath! An eunuch has been gained:
It is old Tubal; he will let you slip
(Both Hepsibah, my jewel, and yourself)
Down to the gardens on the first safe night;
And there thy Haman and myself will wait.
What said fair Hepsibah when first you spoke?
Was she inclined to heark, or hard to win?
I deem her youth all virgin, e'en in thought!

MARAH

She was afraid, and then she thought it wrong
Because the Queen so pets her,—frowned and sighed:
But still she blushed and listened, while I spoke
About thy grace and valour, youth and love—
How thou wast suited to her: I enlarged
The madness of thy passion. . . .

SALOME [interrupting]

This is well;

The Queen has honourable servants, troth!
[The woman lets the curtain swing back in the
doorway and falls on her face before the PRINCESS,
while the CUPBEARER kneeling says]
Most gracious Princess, thou art beautiful;
Must, therefore, know what power beauty wields;
Think gently, then, of those who feel its might.

MARAH [trembling and kissing the hem of the PRINCESS'S robe]

Pardon, dread Lady, pardon, pardon, pardon !

SALOME

Sometimes I need to know what the Queen thinks.

MARAH

I swear to tell thee every word I hear.

SALOME

So be it. I will shield thee, whilst thou dost.

Be off unto the gardens, join the Queen !

[When the woman has gone out she turns suddenly on the CUPBEARER and seizing him by his dress cries]

Hark ! Thou hast had philtres from the Queen.

CUPBEARER [in alarm]

Not I !

SALOME

Fool, thou must say so.—Strange drugs
Hast thou, for years past, mixed in Herod's wine.

The Queen did tell thee they controlled his love,
And bound his faith to her

As passion only binds.

But boy, to-day, to-day, on his return,

She gave thee other drugs, a differing draught ;

And, as she forced these on thee, looked so black,

That thou didst fear her present purpose was

To poison him ! Therefore, thou, at his feet,

Wast saying that which, now, I say to thee.

Dost mark me ? on thy life thou shalt say this,

Or I reveal thy business with this woman :—

How thou hast bought his eunuch,—how thou hast

Deserved the most despiteous death he knows.

Thy terror makes thee totter : be a man !

Collect thy wits ; thou shalt rehearse thy part !

Attend me in my closet shortly ! Go !

[He goes out through the curtain.]

Fortune helps those who take her lightest hint ;

My brother oft affirms it. Prove him right ;

Confirm thy favourite, Fortune ! Light the hint

That I have seized in these two fools' loose love.

They merely plotted pleasure. They shall work

Herod, the engine of my hate—and grind

Thee, Mariamne ; slaves shall crumble thee

Beneath thy husband's hardened heart, and crush

Thy hopes as with a millstone ; these slaves shall !

[She points derisively towards the bed]

Poor Herod, sleep's thy chains, this muslin house

Thy prison—O strong walls !

[A scornful silence, then with deliberate triumph]

I, I

Will free this wife-besotted brother—teach

Our mother fume is smoke but fire effective.

[MIRIAM is heard coming up from the garden. When she enters SALOME, advancing towards her, cries laughing]

Come, hold thy dress out !

[And herself catching it up so as to form a receptacle, empties a purse into it.]

Deem'st thou this a bribe ?

It is a gift. Think well of me, and thou

Shalt speak well too, which I confess I need.

Say what is in thy heart, I ask no more.

No words ! come, tie these in thy kerchief, dolt !

And hide them quickly, for there are who come.

[The other women and eunuchs arrive: SALOME advances to meet them.]

I came to see your mistress. Draws she nigh?

I go to meet her.

[She passes them and goes out.]

REBECCA

Come, let us help the eunuchs to remove
These chests already filled.

NAOMI

They are not locked.

MIRIAM [hurriedly composing her dress]

That's soon done!

[The eunuchs file through and out by the folding doors: the women look at one another.]

MARAH

The Queen does well to trust her with those keys:
Her secrets too with her doth she confide,
Who here alone had speech with *the Princess*.

REBECCA

She hath been bribed; look how confused she is!

HEPSIBAH

Something she sought to hide as we came in!

NAOMI

Her price is on her!

MIRIAM

It is not true; you lie!

MARAH

That's not like innocence!

NAOMI

Not in the least!

[REBECCA catches at her sleeve ; several closing round her begin to drag at her clothes.]

MIRIAM [angrily striking them with the keys]
The Queen shall hear of this !

[A scuffle is toward, when it is arrested by the entrance of the QUEEN, followed by SALOME, from the garden.]

MARIAMNE

Why wilt thou follow me, princess ? I need not
Thy proffered offices. I welcome not
This gust of friendship from an enemy
Whose deep contrition would be wasted time.

SALOME

Thy blindness cannot plumb thy needs, poor soul.

MARIAMNE

Desist, desist.

[Freeing her dress from SALOME'S hand]

Prefer a genuine hate to apish love.

[Coming forward to her women]

What meant the hubbub here ? Is nowhere peace ?

ALL [in one voice, standing off and looking askance at

MIRIAM]

Now, she must clear herself !

MIRIAM [after a pause]

They say I am a spy . . .

[Sobbing and throwing herself at MARIAMNE'S feet]

. . . but I am not !

Indeed, I am not ! 'Tis themselves are bought !

SALOME

Hark, Mariamne ! when thy pride caves in,
Remember me, trapped Fool, remember me !

[Having cried this from the top of the stair she descends into the garden : her disappearance is followed by a painful silence.]

MARIAMNE

No one has taken gold to serve me ill.

Come, not a word !

[Sitting down]

Come, Miriam, weep no more ; it was their fears
And not themselves, accused thee ; souls in dread
Are dreadful to themselves. Yes, we are watched,
And we are listened to ; for palace walls
Have always ears and eyes invisible :

Distrust will not protect us, but trust may.

To trust a foe is often to disarm one ;

And friends are trusted, friendship being trust.

Fear haunts me, I have leant too ready an ear

To apprehensions and become their slave !

Friends, mark me, I, upon suspicion, have

Restrained my husband of his lawful right,

There in the tent, and roused his wrath once more,

By being bold to break my marriage vow

And set a stubborn will against my lord's.—

If I have sinned in this, O thou, still young

And honourably fearless still—though dead—

My brother's soul, reveal to me mine error !

[She presses her hands against her eyes.]

If in the fish-ponds, there, at Jericho

No human enemies, inhuman friends,

Leant aid to drown thee—laughed to mock appeals

Thy last despair put piteously up . . .

O dead face, smile assurance or look thwart

And lower on this heart's ill-judged compunction !

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[After a pause, freeing her eyes with a despairing action.]
Not less are drugged, who sip suspicion's cup,
Than those whose wine was meddled with ; perhaps
Their friends appear like monsters vision-bred,
Their husbands may assume some nightmare shape ;
Stripped are they, then, of all relationship !

How naked is that soul which doubts of love !

Random accusers to protect mere life

They soon become who yield to mutual doubts ;

Forgetful of the best that they have known,

They will count all that made them love-worthy

For loss to save what, saved, can be no more

Than one mean undeserving friendless heart.

[After a pause, turning to HEPSIBAH and putting her arms round her]

Hepsibah, thou art sobbing, guileless child—

This heart's a sample of your trusty hearts ;

Girls, I have not been often harsh with you.

HEPSIBAH [in a broken voice]

Never again, never again,

Will I send messages !

Indeed I will not, oh !

MARIAMNE [starts up and stands away from her]

It is so ! though she seemed a child !—my son ?

My Alexander ? left ! and in the care

Of such as *these* !

[To HEPSIBAH, who has fallen at her feet imploringly]

I loathe you,—loathe you all,

Shameful women ! I am mother and am wife ;

My heart is not that gaping avid thing

That sucks the unwed female, in distress ;

My bosom's richer that it has been milked
Five times, by several pairs of infant lips!
Base hearts! my eldest boy! my Alexander,
Whom I have hoped would one day grow to prove
God's great Messiah, Israel's longed-for King,
Great with his father's greatness, greater yet
With that great glory of the Maccabees—
His nation's saviour! This ye knew, base hearts!
And yet I am alone among you, helpless!

HEPSIBAH

I will be true; I have done nothing yet.

MIRIAM [also prone at Mariamne's feet]

I will be true; here is Salome's gold!

She said it was no bribe, but just a gift,

That I might speak her kindly; she was quick

And forced me take it. Pardon!

HEPSIBAH

Pardon!

MARIAMNE [musingly repeats]

Pardon, pardon!

[The chief of the eunuchs rushes in, falls at
MARIAMNE'S feet and catches hold of her robe.]

EUNUCH

O Queen, O mistress, help!

HEROD'S OFFICER [following]

Madam, the King

Commands that he be tortured and at once!

MARIAMNE

Go tell the King that I protect my slave!

HEROD'S OFFICER

The King forbid us heed aught thou shouldst say.

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MARIAMNE

Take him ; begone !

[The eunuch is carried off—the QUEEN turns to her women.]

Give me my crown and robe of state at once.

ALEXANDRA [entering breathless]

This is the end ! oh, this is thy success !—

His cupbearer falls down at Herod's feet—

Declares that he for years has mixed his wine

With magic philtres which he had from thee :

But that to-day the drink was not the same

As thou at other times providedst him,

Therefore he feared, and rather brooked the blame

Of yielding to a young wife's pretty fears,

Than pour he knew not what in Herod's cup.

Thy husband howls and, like a man possessed,

Stamps up and down ; then bids them fetch thy slave,

And Sohemus he bade them bring him chained ;

And seeing, glared at me in such a sort,

That I made haste to get beyond his reach.

[MARIAMNE sweeps out, having assumed her crown and robe, followed by her women ; but very shortly returns, halts a moment, then says :]

Go see if there are guards

Outside upon those stairs !

HEPSIBAH [who has run to look]

Yes, two stand half-way up

And at the bottom more.

ALEXANDRA

Prisoned ! Thou art indicted of high treason

As Hyrcan was, if I foresee at all.

Behold where all thy humours have an end !—
Me hast thou ruined ; I that warned thee truly ;
I, that, to-day, bade thee thy husband soothe !
Forget not *that* before thy judges. Once,
Whilst yet thou canst, right thou thy mother, girl !—

MARIAMNE [taking off her crown]

What is the use of this ?

[She tosses it on one side.]

ALEXANDRA

Dost thou not heed me even yet, Cold Pride ?

MARIAMNE

When have I been a queen ?

The promises of birth

How they have mocked me !

This violence unjust

Has been my bondage !

This blind man's fury,

This jealous treachery,

This love that risks nought,

Without faith,

Without warmth,

Gripping cold.

It tightens !—

Suffocates !—

Strength fails me !

My children !—

Where are they ?

[She sinks back as the curtain falls.]

ACT IV

[A lofty circular hall. Around the one half seventy-one stalls for the Sanhedrin are built against the wall; the other half is vacant, and here have been brought chairs for CYPROS, SALOME, ALEXANDRA, around whom are gathered the different factions from the palace. A rope separates the two sections: at either end of this rise two thrones approached by many steps; HEROD'S on the extreme left in front; that of ANANEL, the High Priest, at the back in the centre. A clear passage is left from throne to throne along the rope, from which space up to the feet of the JUDGES are arranged a vast quantity of low stools for clerks and scholars. Two lanes, branching through these stools from the centre, run, one to a small door considerably to the right of ANANEL, the other straight to the front of the stage in the centre. By the first, DOCTORS and their PUPILS late to arrive are stealing to their places; by the second, MARIAMNE is being led in, with her back to the auditorium, when the curtain goes slowly up. A small railed dais has been prepared for her where both lanes converge; she is wholly draped in heavy black; the guard who leads her in seats himself on the steps of the dais. The two Officers of the Court are seated one at the foot of HEROD'S throne, one beneath that of ANANEL, and have their backs to those from the palace and face the SANHEDRIN, as does the prisoner. The scholars, of whom there is only a sprinkling, face the accused. Many of the stalls, which describe a deep curve from ANANEL to the extreme right, remain empty. HEROD'S Cupbearer, the only witness, stands beside

the OFFICER at the foot of the KING'S throne; who rising, addresses the QUEEN]

Thou, Mariamne, Queen of Israel,
Art for high treason here arraigned ; whereto
Is joined adultery, with Joseph first,
Thy husband's sister's spouse, and recently
With Sohemus. As thou art draped in black,
According to the custom of this court,
These venerable judges do demand
That thou assume an humble attitude,
And wait thy sentence with submissiveness
Matched to the shadow of that awful peril
Wherein thou standest under Moses' Law.

HEROD [who has his head covered by a napkin]
Is she now stationed where her fatal eyes
Cannot encounter with our own to kindle
That strange enfeebling fondness, which her drugs
Have nourished to such ravage in our frame?

The OFFICER [mounts the steps and draws a curtain looped over HEROD down till it entirely hides the Queen]

My lord, the curtain shields thee from her gaze.

HEROD [removing the napkin, rises in his throne and turns to the Judges]

Ye Priests, Scribes, Elders,—Israel's foremost men,
Some haste appears in this your summoning,
And I perceive your number to fall short ;
For judgment none the less those here suffice.
I am your King ; design against my life
Is treason to the state. Know then, this Queen,
Implacable Mariamne, poisons us—

Holding our reason subject to her will
By philtres and unnatural sorceries,
Till now we find our very life at stake.
Such sullen blackness was from her regard
Discharged, her bribéd minister took fright.
The philtre he had deemed a woman's wile
And pardonable, being not the same
To-day, as that with which he heretofore
Hath mixed our wine, he at our feet fell down—
Confessed the whole—begged mercy and obtained it.

[Bowing his head]

Our boundless fondness very grossly proves
The former potions' devilish effect,
So dire we dare not look on her again,
Yet have to summon utmost resolution
To hold our eyes from truancy foredoomed.

[Raising his head]

Behold that beauty, whose abuse doth this!
Concoctions have not decomposed your blood
Nor brought its currents into servitude;
So ye may marvel at that dignity
Which makes her crime so great a sacrilege.

[Turning and, finding himself obstructed by the curtain,
raising his voice]

On thee, our God's high priest, most wronged I call:
Open our court supreme with solemn prayer.

ANANEL

Blessed art thou, O Lord of Sabaoth;
Mighty and tremendous art thou, God most high;
God of our fathers, God of Abraham,
The God of Israel, the God of Jacob,
The great God mighty and tremendous!

Because thou lovest righteousness, O Lord,
Dost thou rule over us with grace and mercy ;
Else what were we to stand before thy wrath ?
We therefore now beseech thee of thy might ;
To slanderers let there be no hope at all !
May workers of iniquity be lost—
Upon a sudden in a moment let them perish !
O humble them at once and in our sight !
Thus shall thy judges fear thee and judge right.
O help them bring to nought all wrongdoers,
Making of no effect their confidence !
Upon the just, upon the pious, and upon
The elders of thy people and thy priests,
Bestow, Lord, we beseech thee, grace and wisdom !
[He sits down, the whole assembly murmuring]
Amen.

OFFICER [at the foot of HEROD'S throne, rising and addressing the prisoner]

Thou, Mariamne, Queen of Israel,
Hast leave to speak now in thine own defence.

[A silence]

If any here would say aught in defence
Of Mariamne, Queen of Israel,
He, first, before the accuser, shall be heard.

[A silence ; then among the students a murmur of]
Sameas, Sameas.

[At length that Doctor riseth from his seat on the
extreme right.]

SAMEAS

O ye, that are assessors here with me—
O thou, that art our King,—neither myself,
Nor do I think that any other man,
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Can now recall a precedent for this ;
The accused, accuser, nature of the crime,
Amaze as did the deeds of God in Egypt.
Therefore I will not search the law for texts.
None will dispute that, if our Queen hath done
All those things of the which she stands accused,
Her life, though at the mercy of the King,
Is forfeit to the law. But this consider—
And more, O King, than others, ponder thou,
How great and glorious is this woman's blood !
In what respect, till now, she hath been held !
Not only at the court—throughout the land
That reputation virtue only gains
She hath enjoyed ; admit to scheme for this
Conceivable in one perversely willed ;
Yet Jezebel and Cleopatra too
Schemed not for this, but shamelessly did wrong.
Then from experience reason in survey
Draws nought of confirmation in respect
Of her high state and honoured good repute.
Next to her situation turn an eye ;—
On what regardeth passions probable
In such as form her circle and her train.
Not in kings' houses is it hard to find
False witnesses, when one can seek with gold ;
Nor are those high in honour envied least ;
Nor does a woman's hatred take a sword,—
The tongue that sows dissensions she prefers.
Think how thyself stood in like peril once
Of Cleopatra's most offending tongue !
Can innocence, that scruples at a fib,
Foil the contriving lips that freely lie ?

My lord, is any witness to these things
Save this thy youthful, unnerved cupbearer?

HEROD [rising again]

Nay, the chief eunuch, under torture, died
Ere he confessed, so clumsy were my slaves.
Yet he, at least, made plain that Sohemus
Had, in my absence, foully soiled my bed,
Indulging this Queen's hatred and his lust;
Which to my taking-off adds likelihood.

SAMEAS

When but one witness can be brought, my lord,
At least he should be tortured, ere believed;
Unless her Majesty admit the charge?

HEROD

The dying eunuch's testimony confirms.

OFFICER [reads]

Gehazi, on the rack a third time stretched,
Made signal of his willingness to speak;
Relieved, he wept and said his mistress' wrath
Against her husband dated from that day
Whereon she, closeted with Sohemus,
Gained knowledge of commands to him delivered
Under close seal of secrecy. These were,
That should the King die, she should straight be slain.
But questioned of the philtres, he denied
All knowledge and refused to speak thenceforth,
Though racked a fourth and fifth time: when, being
slack'd,
He unexpectedly gave up the ghost,
Despite our care and prompt solicitude.
Signed Draco; witnessed Hasdrubal and Mark.

xlvi.

SAMEAS

Here is no confirmation ; justly weighed
These words hint not adultery, my lord ;
Neither imply they treason in thy Queen :—
And if in Sohemus, not of intent,
But that he, weak, betrayed thy confidence.
He was a man in years, of rigid life ;
They might be closeted without reproach.
Though he did wrong, revealing thy commands,
This need not taint the honour of the Queen.

HEROD

And not, when Joseph failed the selfsame way ?
Would both, for small gain, venture thus their heads ?

SAMEAS

Joseph declared he did reveal his trust
To prove how great thy passion for the Queen,—
Which she, to his confusion, took not so.
Were Sohemus now questioned, it may be
We should hear much to mollify our censure.

HEROD

Were Sohemus not headless, he might fable !—
To woo the Queen, he had but praised the King—
Brought home to her the warmth of my affection
As well as any man so far in years
Could hope to—held my honour worth his own.
Despatch upon conviction, that—that only
Prevents him smile upon and soothe his dupe !

SAMEAS

Examination of this councillor
O King, had helped to justice either way :
So swift to execution is not wise !

HEROD

Must I, to help your wisdoms see the light,
Endure that man's life who usurped my bed?
Why, every man's bed is as a king's throne;
Adulterers are stoned. Far worse his crime!

SAMEAS

✓ But where doubt lurks, question alone sheds light . . .

HEROD [interrupting]

O count it not improbable, brave sirs,
That one so young, so delicate, so fair,
Preferred a grisled elder to myself.
Her hatred, darkening ever more, hath flowed,
Like that great Nile, who sometimes brings thick mud
Into the palaces of Egypt's kings,
From whence nought can debar his sullen force;
So hath her anger, like his swirling flood,
O'erborne the bootless courtesies of life;
So, through the trustful portals of my love,
The sickening moil of pale malignity,
In silence risen from that Nubian source
Her mind, came burdened, and unloadeth now
The heavy breeding slime of household guile
Round throne and life and state.
She, to debauch the man I left in trust,
Would lie with bones and kiss far skinnier hands.
SAMEAS [suddenly pointing with vehemence at the
Cupbearer]
My lord, he should be tortured. See! He shakes!
Perchance some ill-intentioned Arab purse
Hath gilded those white lips.

HEROD

Believe me, sirs, the lad is young and good.

Is not the Queen pale too ?

SAMEAS

My lord, as white as Death.

HEROD

And is not hatred frozen in her face ?

Thou art silent, man ; speak truth. Is this not so ?

SAMEAS

My lord, the Queen is very beautiful,

And may be wronged, and surely is hard placed.

HEROD

Her beauty blinds thee yet : but hate protrudes

As through a soft life-nurturing woman's form

Age slowly thrusts the cheerless skeleton.

SAMEAS

My lord ! my lord ! yet for the sake of form,

This boy should be most straitly put to test !

The Queen is of the blood of Maccabæus,

Greatly beloved among the populace ;

Therefore it were not wise to slight the Law.

She should be heard — this boy should be hard pressed.

HEROD

She should be heard ! She cannot speak for spleen !

She hath been taken thus to-day already.

Her spirit contradicts her form so greatly

That both are at dead-lock : those lips of hers

Are far too fair to speak her very mind ;

Her wholesome flesh doth turn against her soul.—

I, Doctors, vouch that what I say is true ;

It is not just to-day's untasted cup,

Not what this boy may say or may not say,

Which proves her crime. Each added thwarted year
(Wherein, if I have ever found her kind
It has been gained by gifts and patient vows)
Her wedded husband has to woo her still,
Though married now six years ; wherein I, perfect,
Kept me from other laps and lived as boys do,
Sick with their first love's coyness. Lost I heart ?
No, all was suffered with the tenderest love !
Which boundless fondness very grossly proves
As I have said, what drugs did sap my blood.

SAMEAS

O King, to-morrow is the Sabbath eve,
Whereon no sentence can be passed ; nor can
A sentence on a charge which doth involve
Or life or death be passed the selfsame day
On which the trial cometh to its term.
This is the Law ; therefore to set aside
Law's forms will not expediate the end.

HEROD

'Tis superstitious, this respect for forms,
When thou thyself hast pointed out the call
For rapid action,—lest her danger rouse
In the duped people such mistaken warmth
As causeth conflagration unto states—
Tumults that impede the course of law—
Seditions that, once getting head, put all
To the arbitrament of civil war !
Methinks that thou dost secretly incline
To unleash violence, in hopes to gain
By popular consent the reins of power,
Ambitious Pharisee ! I will not risk
The whole achievement of my strenuous life

lii.

(For which I'm mapped with scars—have hardships borne,
Such as thy learned days can form no guess of),
To pleasure thee with one more precedent
For superstitious trifling with mere words.
Peace is at stake. As to this woman's guilt
Who entertains an honest doubt of that?
If any man—her beauty trammels him!
Let such lend ear to what I next will tell,
The chronicle of that insensate hate
With which my so mad fondness is repaid.
Through our betrothal, lasting four long years,
I courted her, then hardly yet a woman.
And to commence, I put away a wife
Of mine own tribe—though she had borne a son,
Was well derived, soft spoken, full of grace :—
An action nigh to madness, many thought.
But, tender virgin though she was, e'en then,
The blood of all her domineering race,
With jealous humours flecked her springtide health.
Her mother's malice educating hers,
Soon found occasion in my every act
For slanders, accusations, tears, and storms.
Her brother, young Aristobulus drowned ;—
I drowned him ! though I proved mine innocence—
A VOICE [from among the Doctors of the Sanhedrin]
It was not proven here.

HEROD

Who spoke ?

[A silence]

The charge was not brought here.—

Sirs, to have drowned him had had full excuse !

For Alexandra and himself I took
In perforated coffins, snugly stowed
And hoist on carriers' shoulders, to be borne
From hence to Egypt, Cleopatra's court,
Haven of refuge for a young fair prince!
Sufficient proof of what their motives were!
Namely, to promise Antony my wife,
Whose picture and her brother's had been sent
By their all-shameless mother to that man,
Whose manners infamous were known to all!
Had I, not God, punished so great offence
Justice had not been wronged. But no, my love
Not only pardoned this, but raised the lad
To the high priesthood: whereat the Most High,
Justly offended that I was so weak,
Caused him to drown while romping in the ponds!
Though I was there, it was already dusk,
And they were swum some distance from the bank.
I saw the splashing, heard them laugh and shout,
His not the least loud voice; then suddenly
A silence fell, and slowly towing him
They did return like frightened children home.
Sport will grow mad: he was as mad as they.

The SAME VOICE [as before]

What tyrant drove them mad?

HEROD

Who spoke?

[A silence]

I heed no man

Who dares not with his presence vouch his voice,
But brief recount what else remains. These women
Entrapped the aged Hyrcan in a plot
liv.

Which unto the Arabians would have sold
You, helpless Jews ; forced to be sudden, I
Had him beheaded ; 'twas, perchance, a fault
To slay a man so harmless in himself ;
But here the philtre worked and warped my mind
To pardon her inhuman mother's guilt
Because she spoke and looked, as now to think
Compels me close mine eyes for fear they turn
And master my control. To-day this witch
Refused me welcome—put on mourning—groaned
When I embraced her—scorning me outright.
Doubtless, she deemed I was a poisoned man !
I weep to think how yet she played with me
As with the mouse the cat doth—gave me hopes,
Between her paws, and seemed to close her eyes,
Forgetful of her hate ;—when Fool ! O Fool !
I, in the garden of my palace—I
Did pace beside her, wooing hate with love. . . .
Five hours since it was ! and yet she lives !

SAMEAS

O King, I see thy pain : but cause and cure
Are they best found of patient or of leech ?
Ah, in thy deep exasperation see,
Imperative, the call for time ! Let bide :
After the Sabbath passed in holy thought,
Return to judgment calmly like a king !
I will be surety for the populace ;
If they rebel, take thou my life, my lord !

HEROD

Thou wilt be surety for the populace !
I said as much ! Thou bold seditious man !
Perhaps my crown is really on thy head ?

This is a witch-craft—drug-deception—nay,
This circular oppression which I feel
Is it not madness?

SAMEAS

Is there no other tongue which dares to plead?
Ye leave me unsupported: aid me, friends!

HEROD

Help him, he totters; the old man will fall!

SAMEAS

Alas, it is thyself that stumblest, King.

STUDENT

O King, I am a student, sitting here,
Both young and little learned: yet the law
Permits that we speak in defence of those
Who stand in danger of their lives—and I
Make bold to tell thee that the Queen did blench,
Change colour, and look near upon to weep
When thou just now didst tell how short a time
Had passed since that thine heart had trusted hers.
May be thou hast been wronged unto her ear,
Even as she in thine, my lord, may be.

HEROD

Send for your nurslings and for those bed-rid;
Such only can find words in such a cause;—
The over silly and the overwise,
Let them “maybe” and query on: but men
Whose reason does not totter, sternly see
Need pressing that this demon’s vot’ress die.

SAMEAS

Nay wait! be careful how ye slight the law!—
This trial has not been in order, Sirs;
lvi.

Although ye suffer from this scourge of God,
[Indignant murmurs among the courtiers]
Remember God more dreadful is than kings!—
And thou, O King, to whom I prophesied
(What time thou, too, cited before this court,
Answeredst charge involving life or death)
This kingly power which thou abusest now ;
Thou, too, wouldst then have been condemned to death
Save that, in lieu of these prescribed black weeds,
Thou cam'st in golden armour, with a troop
And lances to intimidate the hearts
Of judges who feared thee yet more than God.
That time I prophesied their cowardice
[Uneasiness among the Doctors]
Should cringe and suffer 'neath thine alien heel,
As now they do ; for not a judge sits here,
But smarts to see our law so trampled on.
HEROD [interrupting yet more furiously]
Confusion ! Where, without me, would ye be ?
Jerusalem were ruins ! Romans, Sirs,
Or else Arabians, here had pitched their camp,
And with your roof-trees cooked their evening meal,
And fortified themselves with threshold stones
And lintels out from which they marched their slaves.
Gabinus, Barzaphanes, Cassius, Cæsar—
Brave men from anywhere have but to come—
Then, when the robbers from the east did dodge
The Roman cohorts west, when Arabs poured
From out the south, and Parthians from the north,
Oh, ye might beat your breasts ! Oh, ye might roll
Down in the dust, tearing your mantles then !
Jackals would soon whelp in your temple's courts,

And bandits dig your hidden treasures up
From rubble-smothered ruins left to guard
Of conies and the hoarse chough's callow brood.

[The DOCTORS and STUDENTS alike express their
horror, waving their long sleeved arms.]

SAMEAS [alone remains unmoved upright as before,
and now retorts:]

The Almighty could raise up a Maccabæus

A Samson, Gideon, David, Joshua—

Omnipotence depends on no one man!

Deceive thyself no more, but me believe

If now I prophesy:

Repentance, following thine act too late,

Shall make thy fate more dire yet than his

The first Aristobulus of this throne;

Who, now some fourscore years past, slew his mother

And after her his brother; and of whom

Judas the Essenian prophesied,

And all came true according to his words.

He vomited his blood, the which was spilled

Upon the same spot where, by his command,

That brother had been stabbed:

His own was mixed with blood his brother shed. . . .

HEROD [while they force SAMEAS to be silent, in con-
sternation at the KING, almost black in the face with
fury]

Is her blood mine?

Have I my brother slain? Thou onager,

Thou hard-mouthed mule, shalt thou call prophecy

The impudence of thy schooled tongue-wagging?

Am I not held ensample to the world

For love of brothers and for *love* of kin?

Have I, remiss, behaved me tyrant-wise
To Phasaël or Pheroras or Jason,
That thou dost tax me with the infamous
Dead forebear of this wicked Jewish Queen,
Whom I accuse of so resembling him
As offspring will their ancestors? His blood,
The Asmonean, *she* inherits it!!

[To ANANEL, after a pause, in which he glares round
the hall]

Now let the judges signify her guilt!

[At a sign from ANANEL the JUDGES hold out their
hands in sign of assent, while the two Officers record the
votes in the two sections of the hemi-cycle. The vote
is unanimous except for those near SAMEAS, who are
occupied with the old Doctor, who is coughing and
sobbing. The two Officers hand their tablets to
ANANEL, who, having glanced over them and written
the sentence, returns them to the Officer whose place is
on the steps of his throne, and who proclaims:]

Mariamne, Queen of Israel,
Thou art by the Sanhedrin's vote declared
Convicted of high treason, whereunto
Is joined adultery with Joseph, first,—
Thy husband's sister's spouse,—and recently
With Sohemus: for reasons of high state
Thou art condemned to die this very day.
Three hours are thine to seek thy peace with God.

HEROD [as the sentence is read, has drawn back the
curtain and gazes upon MARIAMNE, who turns no whit
toward him but lowers her eyes: after a silence he speaks]
Now that she is condemned by the Sanhedrin,
There is no cause to fear the populace,

As all hath passed according to the law :
And to respect the Sabbath it were well.
The Queen might now to Alexandrium
Be instantly conveyed : our children there
Might take farewell and I . . .

My masters, do I not speak as I should ?

The JUDGES

The thing is very pleasing to us all.

SALOME [loosing the cord, runs forward and mounts
HEROD'S throne]

Herod, thou art bewitched, the potion works !

Thou art like Samson : thy Delilah soon

Will have thee bound and grinding Jewish corn !

Thine eyes are fastened on thy doom, poor King !

Before the Alexandrium were reached

A thousand chances that she would be freed !

Be sure the rumour of her danger spreading,

Has brought together the fanatic mob,

Which will with fifty ambuscades, decoys,

Sudden attacks, and stones from hiding slung,

Soon disconcert the very steadiest guard

That thou canst summon at a moment's call.

[Drawing back the curtains so as again to hide
MARIAMNE from her brother, while he sinks back in
his throne, she continues :]

Herod, I save thee from thyself, unmanned

As thou hast been by years of drug-taking.

[The guard has begun to lead MARIAMNE forward
towards the footlights, when ALEXANDRA, breaking
away from her women, gets in front of her daughter.
All the JUDGES are leaving the court but are stopped
by her voice.]

ALEXANDRA

O shameless wanton, hast thou heard thy mother
Abused for a participant with thee
In all thy crimes, and art thou silent yet ?
How often have I warned thee, headstrong girl,
What ruin thou wouldst bring upon us all,
Didst thou persist in injuring the King—
Debarring from his natural rights a husband
So fond, long-suffering and exemplary ?
Confess it, even to-day, I urged his claims
With every argument my brain could forge !
Say, did I not ?

[Receiving no answer she strikes the QUEEN on the face.]

Speak, stubborn strumpet, speak !

[The guard interposes, and MARIAMNE'S and her own women drag her away, while the whole assembly expresses its disapproval and consternation : but the QUEEN seems not to regard it, save that at first she discovers some concern for her mother's offence : yet proceedeth forward unshaken when the guard recommences to lead, as the curtain falls.]

ACT V

[Three walls of naked rock, with a flat stone ceiling as in Egyptian buildings; to the left a doorway with two huge sliding doors; above this a grating, the one source of light; at the back to the right a narrow door closed upon a staircase of which the two last steps protrude into the prison; in the centre a well, with a wooden barrel fixed above, on which the rope winds. Four of the Queen's maidens are turning its two heavy crank-handles; she herself is seated on the stone parapet that surrounds the well and is just completing her toilet. The water of a former draught, that has been used for washing, stands in a shallow tub at her feet; towels are on the ground; while HEPSIBAH, kneeling, holds the sandal of the QUEEN, waiting to be allowed to strap it on, another woman dries the QUEEN'S hands. Those who have been turning the windlass stop, and one of their number, unhooking the bucket, comes forward.]

Oh! it is clear! The bucket has become
Quite clean, at last.—Wilt thou not bathe thy brow?
There is no least speck clinging to the sides,
Or floating—it is clear and cold and clean!

MIRIAM

Dear Mistress, bathe thy brows and be refreshed.

MARIAMNE [to HEPSIBAH]

Nay,

Why should I lace my feet in curious straps,
To step into the grave?

[To MIRIAM, who with the help of REBECCA brings the bucket to the QUEEN]

Well, let me try—

[Shrinking from contact with it]

It chills me even through my dresses—flashing,
Icy and black with rusted stains. No, no!

It has been used for blood! I know it hath;
Take it away! And though this fear be vain,

[Recovering her self-control]

It is too cold and would intensify
The aching of my brows.

MIRIAM

Let me a little sprinkle in thy face—

There now! does that not do thee good? There, there;—
I knew it would.

MARIAMNE

Enough, enough! Have done!

I am relieved; my brows are not so hot:

Here, let me dip my hands!

[Carefully keeping her face turned from the bucket,
she immerses her hands and then damps her brows
and eyes.]

Now pour the rest away.

REBECCA [empties the bucket down the well]

How long it took before we heard the splash!—
This well must needs be deep.

HEPSIBAH [bending over it]

Impossible to see,
There is so little light.

[Shuddering]

How horrible! how black!

MARIAMNE [who is just receiving her black cloak
from MIRIAM, clutching it to her, repeats]

How horrible ! How black !

It strikes cold too ! So cold !

[Shuddering, she throws it off ; pauses then, roused by
HEPSIBAH beginning to sob]

Come, we must say " Farewell " !

I must prepare my thoughts.

MIRIAM

Oh no, we cannot leave thee !

THE OTHERS [weeping]

Never, never !

MARIAMNE

Indeed, ye should ;

Your tears betray my frailty.

Be brave and quit me now,

All that you can is done.

I had doubts of your truth. . . . But that's forgiven,

And wholly past.

MIRIAM

Nay, kindest, noblest Queen,

Our gratitude's thy generous pardon's due.

MARIAMNE

Oh, it is horrible

To fear those we must brush against and touch

In answering each day's claim ; yet how much worse

Is dread of one whom pleasure, rest and sleep

Have long, and should long link and closet with us !

I was too set upon a perfect life.

Must no fault be to find in Herod's love ?

Because a leat was led aside to turn

The mills of darkling thought and gross desire,

Such tampering with my fortune's copious stream

Appeared a crime inhuman—human fault
Scarce marring much less fortune, it had seemed
To women husbanded at lesser cost
Of God's supreme endowments. I, a queen,
Cloyed with profusion, grudged the meagre pence
That hushed those earthy factions in the man,—
His doubts, extortions, inconsistencies ;—
Why, even as he claimed, I claimed too much !
What, what ? to make
Assurance, which mine honour armed him with,
Doubly assured, he gave commands ?—paid spies ?
He did this ? Well, and if he did ? They were
Precautions needless, not devoid of plea,
As sops to nature's frail misgiving boon.

Hepsibah, weep not so : spare thy young heart !

Farewell, Rebecca—Naomi, farewell.

Hepsibah, cease ! thy life is but begun ;
Thou shalt have others dearer to thy life
Than I have ever been.

HEPSIBAH

Does it then happen nothing waits the doing
Of those who would give all they are to help ?

OTHER WOMEN

Alas ! Alas !

HEPSIBAH

Can the truth be, such willing love is vain ?
Our eyes, our tongues, our youth,—might these not work
Upon the King if tried ?

MIRIAM

How ? in what way ?

✓ HEPSIBAH

Can will devoted fail to find a way ?

MIRIAM

We are but slaves, all doors are barred to us.

{ HEPSIBAH

Let us try something ! somewhere let us go !

And all as one wrest from his dark mistake

That light of reason which won him his crown.

MARIAMNE

We utter words

Unconscious of all true contingency—

Speaking as those who speak

Surrounded by a dream—

Their lips are moved, their eyes are closed, they sleep,

Yet are they heard commanding in a place

Far from their beds—conversing even with those

Whose friendship they own not, but only seek,—

Instant to touch things, in a treasury,

Guarded by enemies

Enfortressed in a town

A thousand miles away.

Has not my heart done this ?—

The Herod loved was ne'er the Herod seen ;

I was but tender with a fond illusion ;

My kindness never met

The *very* call for aid,

Great Herod's bitter need.

Then how dared I to set

That crying out in slumber for his dream,

That straining after the impossible,

Against his true substantial kindnesses,

lxvi.

And would not humour him as he did me ?
How often has he turned my wrath with words
Too kind for aught save the repentant kiss
Which lips, more true than my poor soul dared be,
Refused no longer ; like a child that smiles
Despite the anger hugged unto its breast ?

HEPSIBAH

Can no one tell him what the Queen has said ?

MIRIAM

Alas,
We are but silly women hear these things !

HEPSIBAH

While he, whose madness these kind words would cure,
Pines in a hostile silence fenced and caged.

MARIAMNE

When he grew sick, who good, was good to me,
Had I no sweetness—no rich laxative
To soften his warped heart and stiffened will ?
Was I found poorer than poor women even,
Who still have saved a cruise of oil—a box
Of precious ointment to anoint a bruise
Or do deep wounds some service, and repair
The damage of the man who fought for them—
Was jealous for their honour to excess ?
Will they not bear with many slights from such ?—
Forego much liberty to humour them ?
But I, a Queen, I, who have royal blood,
Returned him slight for slight—
Retrenched his freedom, when he curtailed mine,—
Refused him welcome—welcome
Of which love is the promise, as I think,

More truly than of any other good!—
“Thou shalt be always welcome,”—friendship even
Finds heart enough to say as much as that!

HEPSIBAH

He must be told: report but half of this;
And ye shall see his love turn from Death's door
And come to her again.

MIRIAM

We women slaves
Feeling! knowing! are heeded but as pigeons!

NAOMI

Had we but strength, authority, or madness!

HEPSIBAH

We can but die against the door refused,
Or on the sword that is like us determined.

MARIAMNE

They will forbid ye: even your cries will never
Reach to his ear: but it is best ye go

Before my heart, my lips, my eyes, rebel

O'erpowering what of dignity remains.

Come, go—O Miriam, think of my fond hopes!

My Alexander, be thou all to him

As to Messiah—anxious—prompt!—Poor child,

It may be yet the Lord shall choose my son:

His father was not then what now he is,

And I was better far.

Remember, Miriam, all those glorious days:

The generous product of such hours might well

Bless all the world to come!—It seems so, now—

To me, it seems so, who have dwindled down

Till all my riches is the time long past.—

Marah, farewell.—God bless each one of you.
When ye have failed as needs it must ye shall,
Come not back to me, let me die alone ;
I have no heart again to say, farewell.

[The women, gathered on the steps which lead straight up, say “Farewell.” Then MIRIAM, kissing the QUEEN once again, joins them, and closes the door on the mass of their white garments.]

MARIAMNE [having listened to their footsteps distancing]

They go away—I sent them—O proud Heart !
Art thou so terribly afraid to fail?—

E'en in extremity wouldst rather still

Stoop than be seen to stoop? These walls are stone,

But thou art stonier than these walls, O Pride.

Thou didst forbid my tears—forbid mine arms
That furious embrace which should have bound
Forever those dear friends, whose hands helped me
Each day, and every day, and all day long !

Thus are they paid : my heart remains unknown.

[Slowly pacing she continues with bitter emphasis.]

All this long *study* to ensure control,

That makes us slaves unto our dignity—

To the mere phantom of our would-be worth,—

How *this* improves warm love and cheerful life !

Have I been wary of my mother's fault,

Rash rage that gathers unto madness fast,—

Have I despised my husband's jealousy,—

Have I contemned *these* for their garrulous tongues

And women's over-talking,—all for *this*,

To find the issues of my nature choked ?

That, now, the merest vacancy would look
As well and yield as much good grace as I ?
Then is thy death come timely, tongue-tied soul !
This *bolted door*, let it be forced at once,
Since all that I have stored within this breast,
Is good for naught, and I, though rich, am poor
If my friends' need is now perforce refused.

[Having beaten her bosom during the last lines, she turns dejectedly, props her elbows on one of the handles of the windlass, and after a pause resumes.]

My husband loved me,—not indeed as I
Hoped, being foolish,—still he gave me much.
And even now I am in reach of love,
If I could only force these lips to cry ;
But Pride has sealed them fast :—
If I could only in my heart forgive,
But this I cannot do ;
Let others do it,
Let them when little learn :—
But I will die.

[She sits down and bows her face in her hands.]

My Alexander, O my Christ, am I
More cruel to thee than thy father is,
Leaving thee child of a beheaded Queen,
Who could make no defence, whose stubborn lips
Were steadfast in suppression of the truth—
Let lies have way and gave wild passion rein
Because she did not choose to stoop her pride ?

[Clasping her hands]

O God, I will be penitent, contrite ;
Choose thou my son, anoint his head with oil—
Hand-maiden to thy hope in him, my life,

With year-long service, shall his virtues nurse
 And help him to be worthy. Hear my prayer,
 O Lord of Sabaoth, forgive my sin !
 [Commencing to pace about, she proceeds with increasing animation]
 How it is dreadful to give brooding way !
 Almost was I asleep :—this tragic dream
 Has flattered every pampered fault of mine ;
 This prison, these torn garments, these bare feet,
 That small and barred-out call of Light on Life. . . .
 Thus doth Death bid me think the day far off,
 The active Day !
 Night nears ;
 Death's dupe holds dreamy converse with her soul.
 But I am of the day ! I live ! I breathe !
 Am mother to an Alexander !—hope
 For the great world with warm maternal pangs !—
 Am young !—am full of courage !—am thy foe,
 Thou gloomy magisterial realmless Death !
 There is a thing to do, which must be done.
 [She stoops down and laces on her sandal, casting anxious glances towards the light]
 That sky hath felt the dusk, as I have felt
 The grave's invasive influence. . . . How long ?
 An hour ? likelier two by this, are spent
 Of those short three allotted me for grace :
 [Rising to reach the second sandal]
 My Alexander, hark ! thy mother lives !
 Hath she been rendered useless by slight checks
 Of things run counter to her darling's hopes ?—
 [Stooping to lace the other sandal]
 Not looked beyond the present in her pride ?—

Passing strict judgment on the moment's man,
When all his days before had solaced hers,
Although he was thy father, and although
He, Herod, veritably is no more
This mad and easily incensed tyrant

[Rising]

Than acting thus he is my husband?—Herod,
Come back! return! come back!

[Resuming her cloak]

[She beats on the door, then pauses.]

Alas!

He no more dares to look me in the face.
He doth believe! He hath believed! No hope!
Yes, there is one;
And this it is:—

For pardon I

Must take unto my credit

More sins than are mine own.

Women have often done as much when girls,
Defending shiftless lovers.

I must confess the philtres . . . but the draught!—
And Sohemus!—and Joseph!

That woman's ruined,

Whose falsehoods, even,

Have no more chance than mine to be believed.

Are these the wits he praised?

Invent! invent!

[Beating her forehead]

[A guard opens the door. He has been heard on the
stairs before.]

Haste thou unto the King, and say, I pray
To see his face once more.

The GUARD

Madam, I will.

MARIAMNE

Alas, and should he come, and dread mine eyes
Then, most of all, when love leaps out from them?
My smile a snare, and every glance a toil!
Are these conditions for repentance, God?
If he regard me but as leprosy—
Esteem what he most loves in me as worst,
I am defiled by such suspicions. Yea,
And shall be forced to act vile as his thought—
Garnish this body as he deems tempts best—
Worm to his favour as he holds I left it,
Making my arms like serpents, and my throat,
Like the lascivious reed-pipe, gurgle moans
Controlled by lips and fingers of a man
That eats and drinks and sleeps with dancing girls!
Sohemus, doubtless, was entangled thus,
And Joseph, poor old gossip. Bah! I dream;
The only proper course has been pursued.

GUARD [re-opening the door]

Madam, the King refuses audience both
To me and to thy words.

MARIAMNE

Thou hast our thanks.

[The guard withdraws, closing the door, and is heard
to ascend the steps.]

O Death,

Let me think well of thee! We rise again;
Hyrchan was doubtless wrong, the Pharisees
And those of Alexandria in the right;

If all were vanity, as he maintained,
Despair would not be cruel : and it is.
[Peering down the well]
Icy and black and deep and mute and still !—
Attracting so the downward inclination
Of our prone minds. To lie forever still ?
Rest ? Horror wed to Peace doth sleep below.
The water, that waits mute, would shout a welcome
And echoes upward noise how I was hailed !—
Hoarse laughter “Vanity of vanities” —
Hollow resoundings swelling out to naught !
Oh no, that water's dead, but there are living ;
“They have forsaken the Eternal,
The fountain of living waters.”

[She kneels]
A broken and a contrite spirit, Thou
Wilt not reject. O Lord,
I cannot now undo
The wrongs that I have done ;
Accept my penitence—
Accept my son.

[Creaking, the doors on the left commence to open ;
she gets up, gathers together her black robes, leaving
her head alone uncloaked, and faces the light which two
SLAVES with their utmost effort barely avail to slowly
widen,—then pointing]

Is that the place where I must kneel ?

VOICE [from without]

It is.

[She walks firmly out through the two doors which the
SLAVES at once commence to drag together again.]

[A silence]

[Then the narrow door is violently opened and CASTOBAR enters carrying keys. He shouts to the two SLAVES, who have remained within the prison.]

CASTOBAR

Here is the seal!—delay the execution!

[The SLAVES commence once more to push the doors; when they are some foot apart, he covers his face with his hands, bowing his head. A pause. Then HEROD enters breathless: CASTOBAR hearing his approach signs to the SLAVES to shut the door, and rushing forward helps them.]

HEROD [shouts]

Mariamne!

[And throws himself against the closing doors. The others stand back, while he sinks gradually to the ground, sobbing. After a pause, he looks up and speaks with difficulty.]

My grief is nothing:

This enervating passion will decrease,

My blood will clear.

[Rising, he continues with an effort to control himself.]

I have sufficient strength to walk, to live,

To think, if not to hope. Still, still my mind

Knows virtue, and can nobleness admire;

I am a man still, standing in the light,

Distinguishing the worthless from the worthy,

And not confused in judgment—

O my wife!

[With a wail, he totters and falls; CASTOBAR hurries to him as the curtain comes down.]

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